

# Cherokee National Forest

## Habitat Enhancement on Whigg Meadow



On Wednesday, October 25, 2017, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA), US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), University of Tennessee, Knox-

ville students along with the United States Forest Service (FS) all came together in the Cherokee National Forest for one reason -the Carolina northern flying squirrel (*Glaucomys sabrinus coloratus*).

The Cherokee National Forest is home to 43 species of mammals. The Carolina northern flying squirrel (CNFS) is one of them, but this isn't your typical squirrel. It prefers spruce-fir and northern hardwood forests at elevations above 4,000 feet. You've never seen one? Well, it's nocturnal and has been a federally listed endangered species since 1985. Full force efforts on behalf of its protection and recovery have been in effect since.

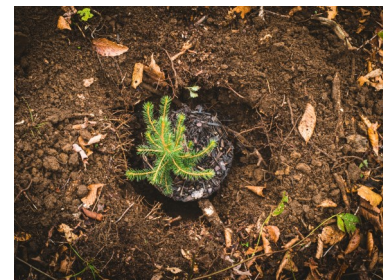


Those efforts were multiplied when 3 different agencies and 10 university students joined forces for a habitat enhancement project at Whigg Meadow in the Cherokee National Forest's Tellico Ranger District. Whigg Meadow sits at a brisk 4,931 feet making it a prime candidate in providing habitat for the CNFS. This project is part of continuing habitat enhancement endeavors.



In July 2015, good news reached Sue Cameron, US Fish and Wildlife Service biologist—presence of the CNFS was confirmed at Whigg Meadow. Cameron explained that habitat enhancement for the CNFS has been in the works near the meadow by the Forest Service for a few years now. Artificial nest boxes were installed and monitoring of the area in the Cherokee National Forest is conducted regularly. A significant step towards improving habitat at Whigg occurred on October 25 with the planting of 250 red spruce trees purchased by the USFWS.

Red spruce trees not only provide denning habitat for the CNFS but they also provide *mycorrhizal fungi* (i.e., *truffles*), an important habitat component for the squirrel and substantial portion of its diet. The trees need *mycorrhizal fungi* to grow and *mycorrhizal fungi* need the CNFS to disperse their spores - the perfect symbiotic relationship.



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Protecting the CNFS is also a high priority for TWRA. In fact, TWRA updated their State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) in 2015 in order to ad-

dress the adverse effects of climate change on endangered species including the CNFS. SWAP enables the agency to receive funding from the State Wildlife Grants program and these funds ensure the agency to continue their efforts of protecting endangered species in Tennessee such as the Carolina Northern Flying Squirrel.

learning in the classroom. Experiential learning projects such as this teach them the importance of conservation partnerships while getting them actively involved through hands-on experience.” said UTK lecturer and wildlife biologist, Chris Graves.



Tennessee is one of the most biodiverse states in the nation. The Cherokee National Forest is a crucial component of that diversity. With habitat enhancement projects at this scale, it sometimes takes the effort of multiple agencies and partners to make a difference on our public lands.



The project couldn't have been completed without the help from the University of Tennessee's Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries Department. The University offered 10 students who put in over 110 cumulative work hours to help with the planting. "This projects reflects exactly what they are



*Interested in joining the movement towards removing the Carolina northern flying squirrel from the endangered species list?*

Contact Mary Miller at the Cherokee National Forest to learn about volunteer opportunities [mcmiller@fs.fed.us](mailto:mcmiller@fs.fed.us).



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